



## DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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THE CHANCERY

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### MEMO

To: All Parishioners in the Diocese of St. Catharines  
From: Bishop Gerard Bergie  
Date: April 3, 2020  
Re: COVID-19

#### **STAY HOME**

This is the urgent message repeatedly emphasized by public health authorities locally and worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic is now present in our community and is escalating. The situation will worsen, and we are told that the next two weeks are critical if we want to “flatten the curve”. We must take this seriously out of love and respect for our community.

#### **CLOSURES AND CANCELLATIONS IN EFFECT UNTIL MAY 30TH**

We have already had to close our parish churches to the public. Parish offices and the Catholic Centre remain closed to the public, with staff working from home as much as possible, monitoring phones and email. All parish and diocesan social events and meetings are cancelled.

Special large celebrations including First Communion and Confirmations will be rescheduled.

**STAY HOME.** This must be our over-riding consideration until further notice.

#### **HOLY WEEK CELEBRATIONS 2020**

#### **PALM SUNDAY**

Bishop Bergie will preside at all Holy Week celebrations at the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria. All celebrations will be livestreamed, and accessible on the diocesan website [www.saintcd.com](http://www.saintcd.com), Facebook page [www.facebook.com/DioceseofStCatharines](https://www.facebook.com/DioceseofStCatharines), and on the Cathedral website [www.thecathedralinstcatharines.com](http://www.thecathedralinstcatharines.com).

- Palm Sunday, 11:30 am
- Chrism Mass (postponed until a later date)
- Holy Thursday, 7:00 pm
- Good Friday, 3:00 pm
- Easter Vigil, 7:00 pm
- Easter Sunday, 11:30 am

Additionally, Easter Sunday Mass will be broadcast on Cogeco TV Channel 10 ([www.yourtv.tv/niagara](http://www.yourtv.tv/niagara)).

## **WEDDINGS**

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many couples have had to reschedule their weddings, and some are finding it difficult to make new arrangements. The Diocese has had requests to allow couples to marry on Sunday. In view of the current situation, and the uncertainty of when things might begin to normalize, permission may be granted for weddings (with no Mass) to be celebrated on Sundays. This permission is temporary, until the end of 2020, and will be granted only for weddings that have had to be rescheduled due to COVID-19. Couples are asked to contact their parish priest for more information.

## **SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

- The ordinary way of attaining forgiveness for sins is participating in individual and integral confession and absolution. If a person is unable to make an appointment with a priest for the Sacrament during this time, it is sufficient to make a sincere act of contrition and commit to participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible when conditions allow.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not available as a drive-thru or drive-in encounter.
- There will be no permission granted for General Absolution.

## **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

- In the news there have been some distressing stories of people afflicted by COVID-19 dying alone since visitors are not permitted. In the Niagara Region, patients and their loved ones may find great comfort in knowing that all NHS hospital sites (St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls) allow designated priests to anoint gravely ill and dying patients, including COVID-19 patients. This is not the case in other jurisdictions. In our diocese, in addition to Fr. Andy Goodwin (our full-time Chaplain at St. Catharines General Hospital) and myself, five priests have agreed to be available for emergency spiritual care at the three hospitals. All have had specific training for the pandemic protocol. No other priests will be allowed to visit hospitals for the foreseeable future.
- Please visit the diocesan website ([www.saintcd.com](http://www.saintcd.com)) for updates on our response to the pandemic, including a list of parishes in the diocese that are livestreaming Masses and other liturgies. There are also prayer resources available.